

THE KING AND I

The Story

Anna Leonowens accepts the post of governess to the children of the King of Siam. With her young son Louis, she arrives at Bangkok where she is upset to find that the King has not kept his promise to provide a house for her; she and Louis must live in the Palace. They are kept waiting three weeks before meets the despotic King, and she pleads for her own house but does not get it. She is shocked to observe the toad-like servility of the Court to the King, and is astounded at the casual manner in which he accepts a beautiful young girl, Tuptim, as a present from the Prince of Burma.

Anna quickly settles down to teaching the favourite royal wives and children, and becomes increasingly attached to them, particularly to the head wife - mother of Crown Prince Chululongkorn - the Lady Thiang, and to the newcomer, Tuptim. Anna discovers that Tuptim is in love with Lun Tha, who escorted her from Burma, and she allows them to meet occasionally in her quarters. The King has a horror of being considered barbaric by Western standards, and gradually comes to rely upon Anna's judgment.

With tact and flattery she comes to influence the King for the good of his family and the nation. Her crowning triumph is to organise a state reception for Sir Edward Ramsay, a British diplomat, on whose report to Queen Victoria the future of Siam and the reputation of the King will depend. Sir Edward proves to be an old suitor of Anna. The high mark of the affair is a ballet based upon "Uncle Tom's Cabin" by Tuptim.

The easy familiarity between Ramsay and Anna irritates the King. He is staggered to see them dance together, but being persuaded that it is in the best Western tradition, he insists upon Anna teaching him to dance the polka. The dance is rudely interrupted by the news that Tuptim has been intercepted an elopement with Lun Tha. The terrified girl is dragged in to be flogged by a powerful Amazon. Anna is revolted by the scene and pleads for the girl, but King brushes her aside and; taking the whip, is about to beat Tuptim himself. Anna, incensed, tells him he *is* a barbarian. She wins the mental battle the King drops the whip, and leaves Anna in command. But the news that Tha is dead breaks poor Tuptim's heart.

Anna, convinced that she can do no more good in the royal household, packs to leave by the next boat. But just as she is about to embark, the Thiang comes to tell her the King is dying and begs to see her. She goes to his chamber, where his vast family is already assembled. The pleading of the children and the wish of the dying King persuade her to stay.